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Kennan Annoys Kremlin

Officially, according to the Kremlin's definition of the grounds for its demand for the recall of Ambassador George F. Kennan, the ruling lords of the Soviet Union were incensed by the "slandrous" and "completely false" character of his remarks about the conditions surrounding a diplomatic representative of the United States in Moscow, as quoted in a Berlin newspaper in the course of a recent visit to that city. Actually, it may be surmised, what directly annoyed the Kremlin was that he had presumed to express a fairly outspoken suggestion of the truth.

We have had prior hints—Ambassador Kennan's predecessor Gen. W. Bedell Smith has dropped a few—that the customary attitude of official authorities toward spokesmen for this country in the Soviet Union capital is a great deal less than perfectly courteous and considerate. At the same time, however, it is evidently inferable that the suddenly revealed hostility of the Kremlin toward our present ambassador has been due, not to the immediate provocation it has cited, but to his firm refusal to swallow its official "line".

Before he was appointed to the Moscow embassy, Mr. Kennan had acquired some public renown in this country by his expert counsel to the State Department regarding the development of its subsequently adopted policy for "containment" of international communism in foreign affairs. He has long had the reputation of being as comprehensively informed an authority on Russia in general and the Communist juggernaut in particular as anybody in the United States, and far better than most.

Consequently, the Kremlin has had virtually no possible chance of misleading him about its plans and purposes. Perhaps that is the main reason why it has decided that it wants nothing more to do with him. But if George F. Kennan has not been able to get along with the Kremlin, as this country's ambassador, it is impossible to think of any possible successor who could do better, or as well.